The Successes and Challenges of Implementing Dance Education into Elementary Classrooms

By

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A research project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Master of Teaching, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto

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Abstract

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education separated Drama and Dance within the arts curriculum for grades 1-8 mandating that dance be implemented and reported on by elementary teachers as its own subject. Although, despite this change and the arts being a core component of the Ontario curriculum, there continues to be low commitment to arts education, especially dance, and inconsistent practices across schools and classrooms.

The purpose of this research is to explore ways in which elementary teachers are using dance as pedagogy and the perceived impact they observe this having for students. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three participants who are all educators from the Greater Toronto Area who have worked with elementary level students through dance education. Findings suggest that there are many different positive benefits for students’ social, emotional, and academic development through cross-curricular integration of dance, but obstacles such as curriculum misconceptions and lack of support, training, and prioritization make it difficult for the implementation of dance education to be consistent and in line with curriculum expectations. The implications of educators’ views indicate that countless students are not receiving dance education due in large part to teachers not being educated and/or confident about delivering this instruction.

Keywords: Dance Education, Curriculum, Integration, Student Success, Teacher Training
Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without a number of people who have supported and pushed me to pursue my passions in dance education. Firstly, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Mary Ann Fratia, my enthusiastic research supervisor who was continuously honest and uplifting and believed that my research was both valuable and valid. I have a great deal of gratitude for my research participants who took the time to provide important insight for this research study and have inspired me to continue my work in dance education. I am thankful for my MT professors and colleagues who have provided an abundance of strategies, practices, resources, and words of wisdom that I will carry with me throughout my teaching career. Thank you to my family who has been a strong source of encouragement and love during throughout this entire process. Specific thanks to Gurpreet Sahmbi and Padmanie Maulkhan for consistently pushing me to reach beyond the expectations I have for myself and for your constant reassurance, love, and care. In addition, thank you to Vasily Giannakeas for always lending an ear and being my personal motivator. Lastly, a very special thank you must go to my mother who put me in my first ballet class, spent countless hours driving, sewing costumes, watching shows, and without whom my dance training and pursuance of passions would not have been possible.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The arts are mandated subject areas in the Ontario curriculum and are divided into four teaching strands: dance, drama, music, and visual arts. Teachers must strive to develop essential skills for students in each of these strands and focus on the four central ideas embedded in the arts curriculum, including developing creativity, communication skills, an understanding of culture, and making interdisciplinary connections (Ministry of Education, 2009). Although the arts are a core component of the Ontario curriculum, the implementation of all four arts is inconsistently practiced in current schools and classrooms. The Ontario Arts Council explains that some schools in the province have very strong arts programs while some allocate little to no in-school teaching time to the arts (Ontario Arts Council, 1997). In addition to such low commitment to arts education, schools faced with budget cuts are often left with few resources and consequently, eliminate positions for arts specialists (Ontario Arts Council, 1997). Research studies challenge these inconsistencies, which show arts education to positively contribute to student learning as well as physical, cognitive, and affective development. In addition, 72% of Canadians support the importance of children being exposed to the arts in schools, which suggests a need for the knowledge and skills fostered in these subject areas (Ontario Arts Council, 1997).
Purpose of the Study

While arts education continues to be marginalized in Ontario schools, research shows that within the four strands of the arts, dance education is one of the most neglected arts in classrooms (Dils, 2007). In light of this issue, the objective of my research is to learn how a sample of educators use dance as pedagogy across subject areas and the impact they have observed this having on students. Such findings should be shared with current and future educators to support them in developing their own consistent approaches for effective dance instruction.

Research Question

The guiding question for this study is: how are elementary teachers using dance as pedagogy and what perceived impact do they observe this having for students? Sub-questions include:

• In what ways do elementary teachers use dance across curriculum subject areas?
• What successes do teachers experience when implementing dance education?
• What challenges or obstacles do elementary teachers face when implementing dance education?

Background of Researcher

Since elementary school, I have always been immersed in the performing arts (dance, drama, and music). I found it particularly easy for me to understand and retain concepts that my teachers would link to the arts, as this would address my personal intelligences including bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and verbal-linguistic. Whenever the arts were embedded in my learning, it was a perfect way for me to harness
my passions and energy to make curriculum meaningful. During high school, I was consistently part of the annual musical where I had the opportunity to choreograph, dance, sing, and act with a group of like-minded students, and this was often the highlight of my school day. After high school, I joined and led many dance groups where I had the opportunity to experience first-hand the joys and benefits of being part of a community in which we continuously support one another’s growth and improvement.

This has led me to my current involvement with dance. At the moment I am part of a non-profit hip-hop organization, Culture Shock, that showcases the power of dance through professional entertainment, dance education, and community enrichment. Through Culture Shock, I have had the opportunity to be a part of countless youth outreach initiatives that work to provide a safe and innovative space for at-risk youth to self-express, build relationships, and develop the mind, body and, soul. This past year, I established our youth troupe, Future Shock Toronto, which allows youth from the ages of 8-17 to train once a week, perform at local and international showcases, and receive mentoring from Culture Shock members. Through all of these experiences, I have witnessed and felt the impact that dance education can have on students. For me, dance has always provided me with the perfect outlet to express myself, develop my personal identity, and build meaningful and supportive relationships. It is for these reasons that I am such a strong advocate for dance education in schools, because while it can be one of the most enriching and valuable subject areas, accessibility to quality dance education is not the reality for many students. I hope to use this research study to outline the direct impact that dance education can have on students and provide approachable teaching strategies for more teachers to feel comfortable implementing dance education in their classrooms as required by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
Overview

In order to respond to these research questions, I conducted a phenomenological research study using purposeful sampling to interview three elementary teachers. These educators are committed to using dance as pedagogy across the curriculum and provide insight on their instructional practices, the perceived impacts they have witnessed it having on students, and the successes and challenges they have experienced first-hand. In chapter 2, I review supporting literature to provide context for the current standing of dance education and the impacts of dance education found in various research studies. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design and methodology used for this study. In chapter 4, I present the results from my research, and in chapter 5, I explore the significance of the findings and their implications for research and teaching practices.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The existing body of literature on the effects and affects of dance education on students highlights the ongoing desperate attempts to justify the need for arts integration in contemporary classrooms. This study addresses ways in which inconsistencies in dance education implementation exist; thus, the marginalized status of arts education as a whole will first be discussed. An overview of current literature will also be discussed, with particular emphasis on the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of dance education, focusing on instruction for all students, the development of the whole child, and finally, skills for the contemporary worker.

Current Standing of Dance Education
The Ongoing Battle in Arts Education

For over three decades, the lack of dance education in classrooms stems from a broader, ongoing battle over the low integration of arts education found across many schools today. Although the practice of all four arts (dance, drama, visual arts, and music) is mandated in the Ontario curriculum for grades 1-8, many schools across the province devote a staggering 25% of time and resources to the arts (Ontario Arts Council, 1997). Ontario documents surrounding the justification of arts education are extremely telling of the current and continuing position of arts in schools. In 1997, The Ontario Arts Council created a document called Making the Case for Arts Education, to provide a descriptive guide for local advocates of arts education. The guide is divided into three parts to provide key messages, an action plan, and resources, and is supported by descriptive research and findings to support teachers and parents, thus creating a strong case for arts education across Ontario schools. However, the key messages found in this document
“Why is arts education important to our students and schools? What can we do to ensure strong, effective and innovative arts education programs?”), are indicative of this topic’s current standing (Ontario Arts Council, 1997, p.3).

The Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario (ETFO) also created a document in 2011 titled *Arts Education for the Development of the Whole Child*, which outlines why the arts matter, current research on brain function, the value of out-of-school arts experiences, and best practices for teachers. The document states that the arts have been consistently threatened in North America since the 1980s, and although there has been a slight shift in pro-arts movements in schools in recent years, there is a constant need to validate the benefits of arts education in different facets of achievement (ETFO, 2011).

Constantijn Koopman of the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague describes the arts education battle:

> Perhaps there is no domain of education in which the issue of justification is so prominent as in arts education. The reason for this is the precarious position of the arts in general education. Arts educators are engaged in an ongoing battle to prevent the arts from being further marginalized, or even removed from the curriculum… In such circumstances there is a great need for arguments demonstrating the importance of the arts in education … the overwhelmingly dominant type of justification of arts education appeals to its positive consequences for knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are not, or not typically, related to the arts themselves


Koopman’s words further emphasize the underlying issue: before even implementing the curriculum, educators need to justify its validity in education.

In 2012, People for Education’s Annual Report on Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools highlighted the relevance and inequitable access of the arts in today’s schools. The results show that less than half of elementary schools have specialist teachers to teach the existing arts curriculum, and that schools are often heavily dependent on parent
fundraising efforts for arts enrichment programs (People for Education, 2012). The report compares the treatment of arts in Ontario schools to that of Finland, a top-performing jurisdiction, where students receive more learning time in arts education than math because it is seen as an essential skill builder for twenty-first-century citizens (People for Education, 2012 citing Timo Lankinen, 2010). Additionally, the experiences that many students currently have in Ontario schools are potentially their only entry point into the arts. It is evident within the provincial documentation that there is substantial support for the merits of arts education, but that significant work must be done in order to effectively promote implementation.

**The Position of Dance Education**

As the battle for arts education wages on, what is the position for dance education? A recent study has found that even when *some* arts integration is practiced in classrooms, dance is omitted or the first subject to be cut when budgets and resources are scarce (Dils, 2007). Karen Kurnaedy (2008) of Simon Fraser University states that dance is often “one of the smaller and most neglected elements within the artistic sphere”(p.26). She explains that dance is a misunderstood aspect of the curriculum in which teachers frequently mistake it as a subject area focusing solely on the exploration of feelings and emotions, without realizing that it also has the ability to foster deep intellect and critical thinking (Kurnaedy, 2008). Bonbright (1999) suggests that although dance is part of the set curriculum, there is a definitive gap between the curriculum expectations and actual practice in classrooms. He goes on to say that dance is one of the least available art forms in classrooms. Being that the arts are already a vulnerable and overlooked curriculum area in Ontario schools, dance education can thus be classified as the most neglected subject area across Ontario classrooms.
Why is there such low implementation of dance within the classroom despite it being a curriculum requirement? This may be attributed to the lack of support and training for educators in this specific subject area. People for Education (2012) point out that even though the arts is a main element of curriculum expectations, many teachers only receive a few hours of instruction in the arts in their teacher training program, which is often limited to visual arts, music, and physical education. If pre-service teachers are not trained at all in the basics of movement and dance curriculum instruction, it is very likely that little to no dancing will take place in these classrooms, leaving students void of one of the required curriculum expectations. Cornett and Smithrim (2001) point out that many teachers believe that they need to be a “dancer” to teach dance in the classroom and that “dance is frequently the art form teachers are most unprepared to integrate into their classrooms” (p.261). They discuss the societal importance of body images portrayed through media and how teachers often feel sensitive about their bodies and choose to avoid feeling awkward and uncomfortable - a feeling that is also shared by many students beyond the primary grades. Although there is considerable research demonstrating high levels of engagement and motivation in dance, teachers will encounter obstacles such as students experiencing fear or lack of confidence, so it is of utmost importance then that teachers feel confident and capable themselves, to create a dance lesson that is accessible to all students (Bond & Stinson, 2007).

The Impacts of Dance Education

Success for All

A primary value for using dance education in classrooms is that students are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate skills and learning strategies that may not be brought forth in the traditional academic classroom setting for them. Cornett and Smithrim (2001) highlight transferable learning skills such as concentration,
responsibility, and self-discipline that are all essential for dance. Although teachers may perceive some students to have learning problems within the classroom, they are often amazed with the contrast of learning behaviours demonstrated in an arts setting such as dance. Baum, Owen and Orek (1997) witnessed valuable learning behaviours being demonstrated when observing a student in a dance class who was considered by her grade four teacher to have low skills and struggles with academic tasks. To their surprise, within a few moments of observing her behaviour during a dance lesson, the student demonstrated a range of learning behaviours including focus, self-regulation, self-assessment, initiative, problem solving, and perseverance.

In dance education, individual and collaborative participation is a central tenet, which fosters engaged learning environments for students who may lack interest in other subject areas (Chappell, 2007). Arts instruction provides an accessible opportunity for all students to succeed by presenting information and thinking in a variety of ways, consistent with Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999). Within a dance lesson, students are given the opportunity to use non-verbal spatial sense, musical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Keinanen, Hetland, & Winner, 2000). Wrenn Cook (2005) points out the importance of dance programs in schools by stating,

Perhaps even more importantly, however, schools must provide quality dance programs that not only impart essential dance knowledge and skills to every child but also provide the safe havens so urgently needed by divergent learners who all too often never experience the joy of learning and the pride of success.

Dance education creates the perfect forum for teachers to address many existing intelligences in the classroom, giving students more than one way to succeed (Cook, 2005). Dance provides an alternate medium for students to explore and communicate learning; in other words, dance can be used as another form of literacy. Cornett and
Smithrim (2001) emphasize that movement is a universal language that “enables students to express thoughts and feelings that otherwise may be inexpressible” (p. 265).

From an educator’s point of view, arts instruction has always integrated forward thinking teaching strategies such as collaborative learning and problem solving, peer teaching, and the teacher as a facilitator – strategies that evolving teachers strive to apply across their classrooms. Such instructional methods are easily transferable to other subject areas and should be used for enriching content delivery and addressing the broad spectrum of student needs, ranging from gifted to at-risk (Cook, 2005).

Though much of the existing research demonstrates the effects of arts instruction on the transferable skills of dance education, there are few studies that focus on the relationship between dance and academic achievement. A recent study conducted by researchers from DePaul University and the 3D Group in Berkeley, California, suggests that dance can be used to improve reading skills for students (ETFO 2011 citing McMahon, Rose, & Parks, 2003). The program, “Basic Reading Through Dance”, was a 20-session program for students in grade 1, and when students in the program were assessed on all reading skills, the results showed that these students performed considerably higher than those who participated in traditional learning methods. Dance and other art forms have proven their intrinsic values and ability to enhance other important subject areas (ETFO, 2011). Teachers can and should capitalize on the power of “embodied knowledge” through movement across other subject areas (MacBean, 2014). MacBean (2014) recounts a teacher who used movement to instill mental and physical connections and empathy for historical moments such as slaves forced to pick cotton.

Imagine that it is 102 degrees. Imagine that the cotton has made your hands raw from the sticky embedded seeds. You are not allowed to speak. You are not allowed to get up. You are not allowed to speak or even look around. Hold your position, please (MacBean, 2014).
These movement explorations help students embody and reinforce important connections to what they are studying (MacBean, 2014). Teachers can use movement as a tool to foster authentic and conceptual connections across all disciplines (Toronto District School Board citing Toronto Board of Education, 1997). It also provides students with heightened motivation, engagement, attitude, as well as a sense of community and empathy, which can all contribute to a positive learning environment that supports student success (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga).

**Developing the Whole Child**

ETFO (2011) classifies the whole child as being one “who is skilled in the arts and other subject areas, but who is also becoming prepared, through schooling, to be a thoughtful and contributing member of society.” When teachers work to develop a whole child they must consider the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical aspects of a student, all while making sure that this occurs in a safe and supportive learning environment. According to Cornett and Smithrim (2001), dance is a unique art form in that it initiates a mind-body connection that involves the whole person. They state, “teachers interested in helping children become ‘whole’ people will find the idea of dance integration consistent with holistic learning” (Cornett and Smithrim, 2001, p. 264). Colla J. MacDonald (1991) suggests that holistic education focuses on the relationship between the mind and body and making connections between a student’s inner and outer worlds and that creative dance can facilitate these connections because it is both an intellectual and physical activity. MacDonald draws on the words of Isadora Duncan from the 1900s who explains “dance should not be an end in itself, but rather an outward result of inward awareness” (p.435). Dance can be used as a medium for students to outwardly express their inner feelings with their body and movements, tapping into their physical, emotional,
and intellectual development (MacDonald, 1991). The Toronto Board of Education echoes these thoughts by stating that “through dance, students connect transcendent realities: time and space, experience and event, body and spirit, intellect and emotion.” (Toronto District School Board citing Toronto Board of Education, 1997).

**Skills for the Contemporary Worker**

The Conference Board of Canada (2011) lists the necessary skills for a contemporary worker to contribute to an organization’s innovation performance as creativity, problem-solving, continuous self-assessment, risk-assessment and risk-taking, relationship-building and communication skills, and finally implementation skills. The importance of developing these skills through the arts is further emphasized in the 2012 Annual People for Education arts report, with a particular focus on the evidence that supports arts education as an effective means to develop and hone the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed in today’s economy.

The ability to self-regulate and self-assess is strongly developed throughout dance education. Researchers Baum et al. (1997) observed a dance student, Dionne, in grade four who demonstrated self-regulation and assessment throughout her class by moving herself to a spot in the room that heightened her learning process, “marked” the moves with patterning, asked questions, and critically self-assessed her movement to make corrections. Self-regulation occurs when students are aware of personal learning processes and select effective strategies to successfully complete tasks, which Dionne is seen doing when she moves herself to a better learning area, asks questions, and makes corrections to perform the moves properly (Baum et al. citing Bandura 1986; Zimmerman 1989). These researchers also indicate that many teachers have low expectations for students that have learning difficulties and quickly label them as low-achieving students.
Having low expectations for these students often sparks behavioural challenges or low motivation for students to pay attention, leading teachers to focus on behaviour management and maintaining a calm classroom, an environment that can have a negative impact on a student’s self-regulation (Baum et al., 1997).

Henley (2014) explains that dance education links students to the “perceptual-motor-emotional world” versus a “symbolic world of letters and numbers” (p.96). Henley explains this notion further by stating,

To be specific, I would say that dance education immerses the student in an embodied experience by uniquely training three sensory systems: exteroception (mapping of the external world), proprioception (mapping of self-shapes and -movement), and interoception (matching of bodily states to emotions and thoughts (2014, p.96).

He points out that creative leadership for the 21st century requires students to hone skills such as innovation and initiative and compares different ways of developing new ways of thinking by asserting that “language and mathematics are two systems for accessing critical thinking, but critical thinking can also be accessed through systems of interoception, proprioception, and exteroception” (Henley, 2014, p.100).

It is important to note then that throughout the Ontario arts curriculum, two key processes are consistently emphasized and linked together: the creative and critical analysis process (Ministry of Education, 2009). Dance deeply immerses students into both these processes by providing numerous opportunities to challenge, imagine, plan, explore, experiment, present, reflect, and evaluate. It also allows students to observe and experience the different ways that people can respond to the same work (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Diane Lynch Fraser, author of Playdancing, believes that creativity is fostered in students through dance and that critical thinking is a key component of creativity (Schwartz 1993 citing Fraser, 1991). Teaching dance allows teachers to create an
atmosphere that enables personal and creative growth in students by having them understand the movement of their body, connecting it with their mind, and discovering similarities and differences between themselves, others, and the world around them (Schwartz, 1993). Building on this notion, Dils (2007) states that teaching dance has a number of outcomes for students including creative and intellectual achievements, better problem solving skills in both individual and group settings, critical understandings of the mind, body and social constructs as well as imaginative engagement.

Warren Goldring, co-founder of AGR Management, speaks to the value of arts education for the future of students by stating,

Don’t overlook education in the arts. There has been a tendency for students today to study the hard sciences, business, or computers. An arts training will provide the ability to think logically and that’s the commodity that is in the shortest supply in business … studying the arts will develop skills that can help you in any career (ETFO, 2011 citing Campbell & Townshend, 1997).

This quote is of utmost importance in highlighting the significance that dance education brings to students by not only enriching curriculum content but by instilling valuable skills needed for a strong foundation and future in any career path.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

In order to fully explore the significance of how teachers implement dance education into classrooms, I employed a phenomenological research approach. This began with a review of the literature surrounding the ongoing battle in arts education, the current status of dance education as well as the potential impacts of dance education on students. Following the literature review, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with a sample of educators in the Greater Toronto Area who are currently integrating dance into their classrooms in a consistent and meaningful way. These educators have demonstrated leadership and commitment to dance education through participating in or leading professional development in the subject and by using dance as an everyday practice rather than an exclusive subject or unit.

Participants

Participants were selected based on their experiences using dance as pedagogy across curriculum areas in schools within the Greater Toronto Area. Educators were required to have used dance for more than just a single lesson or unit in their classrooms. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

1. Valerie has been a dance educator for over 20 years. She is currently teaching at the secondary level and also teaches the additional qualification course (AQ) for both elementary and secondary teachers. She has served as Dance Liaison for the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE) in addition to being a writer, reviewer, and consultant for the provincial dance curriculum.

2. Tracey has been teaching for 14 years. Before her current role as an in-school enhanced learning program (ISELP) teacher, she served as a K-6 rotary teacher for
dance and drama in different schools. Tracey is also a chair for the Peel Dance Teachers Association.

3. Shannon has been teaching for 18 years and is currently a K-5 planning time teacher. She established the dance program at her school three years ago to ensure that students have equal access to dance as they do with other subjects such as music and physical education. She also teaches the dance AQ for elementary teachers.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data was first collected by conducting semi-structured interviews in a location that was most convenient for the participant. The interviews were each 45-60 minutes and recorded using a portable recording device.

The semi-structured interview framework allowed for an array of insights and flexibility in exploring topics in more detail (Creswell, 2012). This framework was ideal for two-way communication during the interview process, which easily allowed for clarification and extensions. Interview questions (see Appendix B) were developed to gather information on the following categories: background of the participant, examples and experience with integration, student impact and attitudes, challenges and obstacles, prioritization in participants’ respective schools, and recommendations.

After transcribing each interview, the data was analyzed in the following stages:

- Summary points were inserted and colour coded for emerging themes in each transcript
- Summary points for each participant were put into a chart with the following headings: Preliminary Code, Requirements, and Examples
• Each participant’s chart was compared to one another to find and combine common themes
• Data was finally grouped into four overall themes each with two to three sub-themes

**Ethical Review Procedures**

Participants were initially contacted via email and provided with a personal introduction, the parameters of the research study, the sampling criteria for participants, and an outline of the interview procedure. Once participants were confirmed, an electronic copy of the consent letter was sent in order for the interview to proceed (see Appendix A). Participants were given the option to be sent the interview questions beforehand to provide an opportunity to review questions and seek clarification. Participants were also made aware that the interview would be recorded and pseudonyms would be used in the transcript to maintain anonymity. Each participant was also offered the option to review the transcript of their respective interview and to further clarify and/or expand their responses. All participants were told that they will be notified when the final research paper is complete and will have access to it upon request.

**Limitations**

The full scope of the research study is mainly limited by the small sample size of participants. In addition, the educators in this study all teach in the same board, have a strong training and background in dance, and are all the same gender. It may be valuable to see if differences in boards, gender and dance background have a noticeable impact on the perceptions and implementation strategies of participants. The intention of this study, however, is not to generalize teachers’ perspectives on dance education but to learn from a sample of teachers and how they do this work. In contrast, a quantitative study
measuring the effects of dance education on student achievement and performance could inform the research problem by privileging students’ experiences and perspectives (i.e. assessment scores, student/teacher surveys). These might include attention to themes outside the purview of teachers’ considerations, including for example the impact on self-esteem, self-expression, building relationships and the ability to be creative. At the same time, an important initial stage of making meaning of students’ experiences in dance education is to focus attention on what their teachers are doing and why – which I will address through the qualitative interviews. An important next step following from this study will be to conduct classroom observations to see first-hand the strategies these teachers are using, the challenges they face, and the range of student responses that occur in terms of behaviour, engagement, and motivation.

**Strengths**

This study is an important opportunity to learn from and highlight the instructional decision-making and strategies of a sample of teachers committed to using dance as meaningful pedagogy across curriculum subject areas. Participating teachers had the opportunity to share personal practices, the impacts they have observed, challenges experienced, and potential methods for overcoming these challenges. For teachers who are uncomfortable or unsure about how to approach dance education, these educators can act as a model for best practices and a valuable resource for learning and broader teacher development. It is my hope that the research findings can, in turn, contribute to a greater board-wide commitment to dance education in schools, and in the long run, contribute to improving the critical and creative processes of students.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

The following findings are based on three separate interviews conducted with the following teachers: Shannon, a K-5 planning time teacher, Valerie, a secondary teacher and Additional Qualification (AQ) instructor, and Tracey, an in-school support program teacher who has previously worked as a rotary dance and drama teacher. The interviews explored the ways in which these teachers implement dance as an independent subject and across other curriculum subject areas, as well as the challenges and successes they have experienced and witnessed through their practices. Four central themes emerged after analyzing each transcript:

- Models of cross-curricular implementation
- Obstacles and misconceptions
- Impacts on students
- Recommendations

Within most themes, a number of connecting and overlapping sub-themes appeared that were commonly expressed by each participant.

Models of Cross-Curricular Implementation

A commonality between participants was the collective commitment and willingness to implement dance throughout various curriculum subjects. All three teachers outlined detailed examples of activities they have created or implemented and within these examples were shared experiences and recommendations for specific subject areas. For example, each teacher mentioned that language is most likely the easiest opportunity to experiment with the implementation of dance. Tracey discussed how she often uses dance in language when exploring the tracking of characters through a story and how their attitudes change and develop. With one class, instead of having students simply write out
timelines for characters in their book, she had students track the emotional arch of an individual character to eventually create a “psychological biography of their character through movement”. Students had to discover ways to interpret and portray the various attitudes and behaviours of their characters through the elements of dance.

A more recent and challenging integration that each participant mentioned was connecting dance with math. The participants all acknowledge the ongoing concern for the improved development of numeracy skills throughout the school boards, and continue to explore and build on activities that integrate dance and math. Valerie in particular led a study that focused on improving math scores by having students embody mathematical concepts in dance class. She worked with a math teacher to dissect the deliverables of the first math unit and subtly embedded those concepts in an African dance unit. She explains how a simple activity in a dance class can engage a student’s use of numeracy skills:

… a simple thing would be: how many students are we in class? Because you know attendance, you always have kids missing in class. So, oh we're 17 people in class today. Okay, after we're done our warm up in the center, I'm going to ask you to line up in three rows, I want equal rows, how many students in each row? And they'd have to work it out. Who has the answer, strike a pose, I will ask you.

Valerie reports that after conducting the unit and discussing with the other teacher, the math scores of students in this class all improved. She also suggested music phrasing and composition as a useful tool for integrating mathematical concepts such as fractions, proportional reasoning, and problem solving.

All participants discuss various possibilities for integrating dance into other subjects as well such as science, geography, and social studies. Shannon mentions a grade four unit, which connects dance, habitats, and a social studies unit referencing dances around the world. Tracey suggests using dance in science units dealing with types of motion and flight, as well as geography units focusing on natural disasters.
In light of cross-curricular implementation, Valerie highlights the need for strong dialogue between disciplines:

We're actually looking at creating a dance lab, and bringing dancers and science kids together to have the scientists describe the concept that they want to explore and having the dancers articulate the science through choreography. So creating dialogue between two disciplines, so the kids will see themselves as scientists and kids will see themselves as dancers, and having the dialogue between the scientist describing what they understand and the dancer trying to manifest those ideas through movement.

Valerie’s example outlines the endless possibilities of integration that can and should occur between various subject areas. She continues to justify her discussion of endless possibilities by pointing out that everything, not only music, can be used as a source for dance, which is especially valuable in elementary classrooms; teachers can use anything that students are learning in other classes as a source for dance. She notes that cross-curricular integration is highly valuable but takes innovation and creativity on the teacher’s part. Tracey builds on the value of integrating dance by stating, “I think the strength that dance has in forming students also has to be looked at in the context of the other subjects because it's through those subjects explored through dance that the content is more alive to them.” As a rotary teacher, Tracey would often communicate with classroom teachers to find out what students were studying in their other subjects at that point in the year. She stresses that by making those connections, students are more likely to “buy in” because they have more of a purpose, connection, and reason behind the work that they are doing.

**Obstacles and Misconceptions**

When discussing the low implementation of dance education and the possible reasons for this, the participants continuously brought up many common and overlapping obstacles and misconceptions that may contribute to a teacher’s resistance in teaching
dance. Thus, their thoughts have been grouped into three sub-themes: Lack of support, curriculum, and attitudes.

**Lack of Support**

A major obstacle that stood out to each participant was the lack of preparation in teacher training programs. Tracey discusses the minimal instructional time allotted to the arts in pre-service teacher programs and shares her strong thoughts on why this is a major contributor to the existing gap in implementation:

“It's like a workshop, which is pathetic to be quite honest if you're expected to teach this curriculum as a generalist teacher. And all of the research is there; all of the evidence is there to say this is valuable. And the provincial government has put it in place that this is required. The fact that teachers colleges are not supporting that through their delivery of curriculum to new teachers is appalling.

She expands on her thoughts by explaining that dance has been part of the curriculum since 2009, “and so it should not still be happening. We should not be getting new teachers in school saying I don’t know how to do this.” Valerie echoes Tracey’s thoughts by stating “… when you graduate, you are expected to teach dance and drama. You have to report on it. So if you have to report on it, you have to teach it.” Both teachers are hoping that the new two-year teacher education program will allow for more instructional minutes dedicated to the arts. Although for teachers who have been teaching before the addition of dance in 2009, Shannon suggests that there is still not enough professional development, other than additional qualifications, to support teachers who are unfamiliar with dance education.

An additional challenge that the participants have encountered first-hand is a lack of sufficient teaching space. Tracey explains that space has always been an issue with dance in a classroom and that desks and chairs can often become an obstacle when trying to teach students about breadth of space, but teachers often have to adjust by pushing
them to the side or by using them for the lesson. Valerie encourages teachers to avoid
becoming discouraged by desks and chairs and to instead use them in whatever you are
teaching, but again points out that teachers do need mentoring to make these types of
discoveries. Shannon recounts her unique situation where administrators support her
frequent decisions to have students dancing in halls due to a lack of space:

It's like *Fame* here, people dancing in the halls. You know, when I told those
stories this summer, I had many colleagues say, "Seriously, my principal would
say forget it. Nobody in the halls, that's unsafe". So let's say I had a principal who
said no kids in the hall. You could not create as many great things in that small
space. That would be a challenge, I don't have that challenge.

She continues by pointing out the essential amount of administrative and teacher support
she has when coordinating planning times for extra rehearsals.

**Curriculum**

One of the reoccurring themes throughout each interview was the misconceptions
that teachers have regarding what teaching a dance class looks like versus the actual
expectations set out by the curriculum. Tracey attributes this misconception to teachers
focusing on the actual art form of dance rather than the creative process. She gives an
example of a teacher who leads a school-wide daily physical activity (DPA) session once
a month, in which she teaches a specific type of dance to a full gym of students. Although
she sends out an email to staff saying that the session will address parts of the dance
curriculum, Tracey consistently sends a follow up email to inform teachers that in fact it
will not. Shannon justifies Tracey's position by stating, “this is not you standing at the
front of the room, teaching a routine. Find that in the curriculum, you can’t, that is not
what it’s talking about.” Valerie brings up many teachers who have been influenced by
the media’s depiction of teaching dance as performing and having to demonstrate:

And that's a convention of a dance class, the expert at the front of the room and all
these people following a teacher and unless you crack open the curriculum, there
is nowhere in the elementary curriculum that says teach a technique class. You must stand at the front of the room and teach steps - it doesn't say that anywhere. And it was intentionally written so that teachers without backgrounds can facilitate the creative process. And that’s where there is huge misunderstanding. And I think part of the misunderstanding or misconception is because they actually haven't read the document, and I think that's the big part.

She also outlines an example of what teachers will often do as an alternative to teach dance:

What some people do is they get a little lazy and put on the Just Dance videos and watch their kids copy the Just Dance video and give them a mark, which I'm really not sure how it's constructive. The criteria for that...you can follow... you might as well bring them to an exercise class, what's the difference? It's very skill based and the kid can imitate and the curriculum is really written for students to think, to use dance as a language and as a tool for communication and exploring ideas concepts, source.

Valerie touches on the frustration shared by all the participants in regards to many teachers’ lack of understanding or basic knowledge of the curriculum. Shannon also outlines that the dance curriculum is actually centered on facilitating the creative process for students by giving them the tools they need and setting them free.

**Attitudes**

The final obstacle suggested by each participant is the various attitudes or feelings that teachers have towards dance education itself and its implementation. Participants use words such as “uncomfortable”, “shy”, and “scared” to describe attitudinal issues that can hinder a teacher’s exploration of dance education. Tracey explains that this feeling of discomfort may stem from a teacher’s unfamiliarity with facilitating the creative process.

It's tricky. The creative piece in all of the arts is super super hard to get. Not to get teachers to buy into it, I think they understand it, but it's not how a lot of people learn themselves. A lot of us went through the rote system. Even those people, who were in high school in the 80s, are still getting a lot of delivery by rote, or pencil and paper, books. So then to transfer all of that into this critical inquiry learning and inquiry based learning and creative process base, is a huge jump for a lot teachers. And there's just not enough time spent, not enough time spent teaching them how to do it and how to implement it within each subject area...
Tracey highlights the fact that many teachers have a difficult time teaching this way because they have not been taught personally with this method. Expanding on a teacher’s unfamiliarity with the content, Shannon points out the differences in understanding the elements of different art forms. She explains that there are many books with visual arts activities that help facilitate a teacher’s implementation of the subject and goes on to reflect on books that focus on dance:

But even these dance books, it's still … if you don't understand the elements of dance, it's too hard. Like I kind of understood the elements of art and then I figured it out. But the elements of dance are weird. If you don't really get it, how can you have your kids create? And then when we don't right away, we're like and this isn't working and we shut down.

Shannon points out very real and independent challenges that exist surrounding each art form. With these subject-specific challenges in mind, Tracey examines the inconsistencies of commitment to each art form within schools by stating:

The visual arts is something we spend a lot of time on because it's fine motor and then drama and dance sort of shift. We're more willing to do drama because I don't have to move myself, less willing to do dance because then I don't have to put myself on the line and I can't ask the kids to do it if I'm not willing to do it myself.

Valerie expands on this notion by explaining the societal hierarchies of education. She claims that sciences are at the top, with mathematics and language coming in next, humanities after, and the arts below that. She then reiterates Tracey’s quote above by explaining that there is a hierarchy even within the arts as follows: music, visual arts, drama, and then dance. She tries to understand “what the beef is with dance” by suggesting different societal or cultural views on the main canvas of a dancer - the body.

I think in different societies or cultures, the body is often treated as a very taboo thing - something that we need to reject like rejecting the flesh. And to entertain, the flesh is doing something simple. And movement is really sensual. And I think that sensuality terrifies people and it's not sexual, and it's very important to make that distinction but I don't think people have thought about those questions. That dance is sensual versus sexual. And the body is taboo and the flesh is something that we need to reject, and I sometimes wonder if the body is the thing that's in the way.
Valerie compares dance and the use of one’s body to other arts such as music where the instrument is the focus or drama where one can use their voice. Tracey points out that teachers are more willing to use their bodies and movement in earlier years such as kindergarten or grade one, but after grade two, teachers become increasingly shy about their own skills.

Valerie touches on a common expression she hears from elementary teachers who assert that they cannot teach dance because they are not dancers. Confused, she usually replies by asking them if they teach math and science and then asks if they are mathematicians and scientists. She states, “It’s interesting how we attribute that we must be a dancer to teach dance but we don’t have to be the ‘thing’ to teach those other disciplines. So we need to kind of de-mystify dance as an art form.” Outside of the media, dance is certainly not embedded in our existence and culture as much as in other countries such as Singapore and New Zealand, as mentioned by Tracey. She points out that “it’s so much a part of their existence… Their life is based around the tradition of dance. And we’re very much in a country that does not have that same sort of cultural connection with dance.” Tracey and Valerie both point out the additional societal and cultural factors that can have an effect on a teacher’s attitudes and feelings towards dance and its implementation.

**Impacts on Students**

The participants discussed a number of different impacts on students that they have witnessed and experienced through dance education. The diverse impacts have thus been grouped into two sub-themes: social/behavioural and academic.
Social/Behavioural

Each participant had an opportunity to discuss the student attitudes and impacts they have experienced when implementing dance education, and all three participants have noticed an overwhelmingly positive attitude to dance in their respective schools. Shannon in particular witnesses the power of dance education in making students feel special and confident. She notices that the attitude of students shift to have them confidently say, “…yeah I dance, and I’m really good actually.” She then explains, “Even if they're not. Hopefully I make them feel that everybody is pretty amazing in their own way”; a type of confidence that permeates through these students’ thoughts, which then translates into more risk-taking during learning. Shannon is even able to use it as a motivator for many students to “hold it together” in other subjects if they want to be in a specific piece - a simple way to push students to strive to be the best in all parts of the curriculum. Tracey describes her use of extra-curricular dance as a tool to motivate appropriate behaviour, and notes that this may not be the case in a school where dance is less of a priority. She also finds it to be a useful tool to redirect student energy.

It's definitely one of those things that throughout the day, if your kids are getting squirrely, anything to get them out of their seat is ideal. And whether that's dance or DPA or anything along those lines that is different, redirecting them in some way is always going to beneficial to the whole group, not just the ones who are struggling, to keep their behaviour in check.

Valerie consistently emphasized the necessity for having students move and the reasons for why most teachers may not allow for this to happen:

…it is an atrocity from the age of five or six to be limiting a child's movement to a desk and chair simply so that you can maintain control in your room. And then we quickly jump to conclusions and labels that children are hyper active, they're constantly moving about, they're fidgeting, it's like yeah... because children move. They move to explore, they move to think, they move to understand.

She goes on to highlight that after kindergarten, children are no longer allowed to move and are confined to the unnatural world of desks and chairs that humans are not designed
for. To justify her pro-movement stance, she brings up the notion of mental health and points out the “incredible chemicals that the brain releases when we’re moving,” such as endorphins that create a “natural high”, yet students continue to be restricted to a desk. She also mentions the attachments that are created when moving with a group of people, which lead to an additional emotional impact participants have noticed - the notion of being part of a community.

As a result of changing youth culture, Valerie notices a concerning lack of resiliency in youth today. She notices that students often feel isolated, unsure of how to talk to people, and “trivial issues will just dismantle them”. She outlines the power that dance can have on youth today:

What dance does is it anchors you in the present and by sharing experience together, through shared experience of creating, collaborating, co-creating… that's an attachment. And it bonds us to each other. So isolation is addressed. You feel like you belong or you have found your people or your tribe. I think that's deeply rooted in us as humans; we're always in search of our tribe, and that connection to others. And I think students are very vulnerable, more vulnerable than ever before to mental health issues because they experience isolation.

Valerie continues by exploring a group of people moving together and how it “elevates the spirit of the human being”. She says that the power of moving, responding, and creating something together is “deeply transformational” and something that is hard to find in other disciplines. Shannon speaks to this notion by explaining that dance creates a sense of family and community; that it provides a space where you feel like you belong as opposed to a classroom where some students may be a few grade levels behind in certain subjects. It gives students a place to feel good about themselves. Due in part to these feelings, she has noticed an overwhelming increase in the amount of dancers who audition for the annual board-wide dance showcase and claims that everyone wants to be a part of it.
**Academic**

As mentioned in the *Cross-Curricular* theme, Tracey discusses how dance can be used as a tool to make other subjects come alive for students. In other words, using dance as literacy. She highlights its usefulness especially when teaching English Language Learner (ELL) students:

And so this is a way for them to talk about the character without having to use words. So I find it a really good entry point for those students as well, for the ELL learners to sort of bypass the language barrier and still get their point across.

Tracey additionally highlights that with particular students who cannot sit still or learn from traditional pencil-paper work, it is an effective way to reach the curriculum via dance. This is outlined in Valerie’s study where she mentioned trying to achieve an increase in math scores by integrating math concepts into dance classes. Both academic and applied students experienced an increase in scores after being given the opportunity to use their body as a tool for understanding such concepts.

Tracey also suggests that having students engaged in dance education provides all students with a platform to share ideas with one another and an opportunity to engage in the creative process. Valerie pushes that dance and the arts in general, effectively engages students in the inquiry process, as it is a constant process of questioning.

**Recommendations**

The participants had a number of recommendations on many different levels regarding how to enhance the consistency and commitment of dance education implementation in schools. Their ideas have been grouped into the following sub-themes: resources, prioritization, and accountability.
Resources

An important and effective resource that the participants collectively use is people. Each participant discussed how this type of resource could be used in a number of different ways for teachers who are either unfamiliar or uncomfortable with dance education. Both Tracey and Valerie discuss a mentorship program that was previously in effect to provide support for teachers who are becoming acquainted with the new curriculum. Tracey explains the program:

That was great because you had someone come in and work with you and be there with you while you were trying to deliver this new curriculum and support you and help talk you through it, or model for you and you watched and saw how it worked and tried to do it yourself in your own room.

Valerie echoes the validity of the mentorship program by stating,

But having teachers go through the mentorship program, it's a completely different experience when you have a coach beside you guiding you, answering questions, helping you unpack that learning together.

Unfortunately as valuable as the mentorship program may have been for teachers, Tracey points out that the above situation was a pilot project and has since been put on hold due to a lack of funding. Tracey also brings up the itinerant music program where teachers experience a specialist being brought in who delivers a lesson that they can observe and take part in. They then deliver that lesson two or three times before the specialist returns, and the process is repeated with a new lesson. She suggests that the itinerant music program, another vulnerable but beneficial program, should be expanded to include all art forms.

Valerie recommends that teachers be careful in how they use people resources. For example, when bringing in guest artists, teachers need to ask themselves if they are relying on the guest artist or working with them collaboratively. In Valerie’s case, she often brings in guest artists for “students to see a variety of aesthetics and processes on
how teachers teach their pedagogy, their methodologies for creative work and building work and pathways in dance”. She uses it as a way for students to engage in conversation with other artists who make their livelihood through art to break down misconceptions about the starving artist. Additionally, she uses these guest artists as professional development for herself to replenish her own skills and inform her practice. Valerie highly recommends that teachers actively search for a mentor, coach, or expert within one’s respective school or school board.

When discussing resources outside of people for lesson ideas and implementation guides, all three participants recommend the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE) website as an effective launching point for teachers. Both Shannon and Tracey reflect on the extensiveness and depth of lesson plans featured on the CODE website and Valerie highlights the video component:

There are 15 videos on the CODE website. The ministry actually paid for these videos to be made, they’re professional videos of what implementation looks like and the structure. So they actually have a visual, it's a 20-25 minute video of what it looks like in a regular classroom with a real teacher doing it. It's not on paper, it's real. You get to see the response of the kids.

CODE conferences and the Pulse Ontario Dance conference were also suggested resources by Valerie and Tracey for additional professional development.

Valerie points out that the resources available to teachers are not the problem, but more the initiative of teachers to actually seek out these resources. She expresses that teachers should take the initiative to create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) around the implementation of dance and that it only takes one eager teacher to spearhead a movement. Valerie suggests fostering this initiative through exposure to good practice through conferences, where teachers have the opportunity to make connections to the artistic world and build a strong learning community. Valerie also outlines her goal to have the Pulse conference move to different jurisdictions in order to build these
Finally, Shannon and Tracey highlight that if teachers do have usable resources at reach, they often do not know how to use them to address the curriculum correctly. Shannon recommends that schools send at least one teacher to professional development sessions to return to the school as an expert. She explains, “So sometimes, they say we’re all done, we got these resources, we’re all good. But it’s just going to sit there like all the resources do.” It is just as important to understand how to implement resources correctly in order to actually follow through with curriculum expectations. Tracey recounts a related situation with her school:

… We bought the treasure chest, multicultural treasure chest I think it's called, which is dances from around the world. Wonderful! If you use it appropriately. If you simply put on the DVD and they learn how to do an Israeli circle dance, that is not the dance curriculum… we thought we probably could have done as much follow up as we wanted and we’d still have teachers who would say "Oh, they sent us this! Insert here. That's my dance program."

Tracey’s example highlights the common gap that occurs with resources and curriculum implementation expressed by all three participants.

**Prioritization**

A collective feeling that surfaced during the interviews was that dance is not prioritized in schools as well as other subjects in school. Tracey explains that with many boards pushing numeracy as a key factor in schools, dance is often not a focus for many teachers. She discusses the struggle for achieving an equitable balance across subjects for all teachers:

There are teachers who are able to let it sort of be very much a lesser thing within the curriculum. So one of the big things we do struggle with is equitable balance. So if I'm going to do, or use four assessment pieces for their report card, and you're just going to kind of tuck dance in on the side and you're only going to have two, are you actually delivering the curriculum in such a way the kids are actually
going to meet the expectations? …How do we make that equitable for the students? So that the students who are having four full assessment pieces done through dance in grade seven, that's common across the whole grade level, regardless of who's teaching them dance.

She continues her thoughts by connecting this problem back to the lack of teacher training and teachers not being confident enough to deliver a full and thorough program. She reemphasizes the need for more instructional time in the arts as a whole in teaching training programs. Tracey says that dance is often “thrown off to the phys ed teacher”, who may do a dance unit, but again if they are not focusing intensively on creative process movement, they are not addressing the dance curriculum correctly. She recommends that one way of having dance seen as more of a priority by both teachers and students, is by having teachers implement it from a young age to ensure “buy-in” to dance throughout the years:

So, the students now that I get in middle school, they just know it's part of what they do, it's part of the curriculum, and they are expected to participate and they are expected to buy in. Where as, I suspect in other schools where they haven't had it when they were little it's harder. It's harder to get them to buy in later. I think you have to get them young. You have to get them while they're still comfortable doing whatever you ask them to do, and continue it up through those sort of you know the 9, 10, 11, so when they transition into middle school, it is just part of the curriculum and they have been doing it all along and they just continue. Because the students we have now don't think twice.

Tracey does acknowledge that Ontario is far ahead many other provinces and countries by having dance in the curriculum, but believes the next struggle is actually following through and having that curriculum implemented in the classroom.

Valerie asks teachers to break free from the notion that education has specific disciplinary boxes. She suggests attempting to shatter these disciplinary boxes where certain disciplines are prioritized over others. Valerie says the same prioritization of subjects occurs at the school board level when determining funding.
Shannon had success in increasing dance as a priority in her school by proposing that students receive dance education every day, the same way they are delivered physical education and music. She feels very lucky to have a supportive principal and has now created a K-5 dance program for her school – a program that is unusual for most schools to have. Shannon suggests that one way to make dance more of a priority is the following:

Putting it in the schedule. For example, we hand in our timetables, we know that what they expect to see is math, they expect phys ed to be on there, they expect science, social studies and language blocks to be in there.

Putting dance in the schedule not only increases dance as a priority but also holds teachers accountable for actually including dance in future teaching plans.

**Accountability**

When asked about holding teachers accountable for the implementation of dance education, Valerie expresses that “there is no curriculum police, no one to check on you” and Shannon states, “There is no questioning any more than there is anyone questioning drama.” They both highlight the challenges for holding teachers accountable for delivering the dance curriculum to students.

Shannon acknowledges that long-range plans vary depending on the school, but believes that administrators should ask to see long-range plans from every teacher for every subject that they are expected to teach. Participants agree that it is a major challenge for administrators to hold teachers accountable when they have a lack of knowledge on the subject. Therefore, Valerie suggests having arts coordinators provide information to superintendents who have a direct link to administrators, as more advocacy for the arts needs to be done at higher levels.
Valerie also touches on parents - another key stakeholder who can hold teachers accountable for teaching dance. Although, she says for parents to ask for dance education, they need to be informed. The challenge then becomes that many parents come from education systems where dance education did not exist; there may not be much attachment or experienced value for them. Again, she believes that it is truly a societal level problem.

Summary

Overall, all three educators expressed that the inconsistent commitment and implementation of dance education should be addressed at multiple levels. Tracey outlines one of these levels by stating,

So, at the very base level, you need to have principals be mandating that it be covered and mandate it by giving it the time, and mandate it by giving it the training and allowing partnerships between classes and planning when you’re scheduling…

Shannon reinforces this thought by expressing that administrators should acknowledge the research behind dance education and determine ways that teachers can participate in professional development to become more acquainted with the curriculum and teaching strategies. Shannon and Tracey agree that advocating needs to be done through principals and vice principals to promote the value of arts and emphasize learning through arts as much as language and math. Tracey goes on to highlight the next addressable level – school boards. Both Tracey and Shannon express that school boards should push and promote workshops and mentorship programs much more than they are currently doing. The final level addressed is teachers and teacher training programs. Valerie points out the accessible resources available for teachers but the lack of initiative and confidence that impedes teachers from seeking out such resources. All three educators believe that more
comprehensive dance training in pre-service teacher programs can serve as a starting point for diminishing this hurdle for new teachers.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and successes that elementary teachers experience when implementing the Ministry of Education’s 2009 dance curriculum in the classroom. More specifically, the guiding research question for this study asked, “how are elementary teachers using dance as pedagogy and what perceived impact do they observe this having for students?” The findings suggest that dance education provides many benefits to student learning and development but there are many obstacles and misconceptions that widen the gap between curriculum expectations and actual implementation.

Connections to Literature

A large amount of the findings align with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Connections between the literature and findings of this study will be discussed and grouped based on the sub-questions of the central research question.

1. In what ways do elementary teachers use dance across curriculum subject areas?

All three teachers advocated for the integration of dance when teaching other subject areas to students for a variety of reasons. Consistent with the views of Chappell (2007) on the effectiveness of arts education for students performing low in traditional classroom contexts, Valerie and Tracey point out that dance has the ability to bring content to life and gives students an alternative way to explore subjects and demonstrate learning, which can be especially useful for students with language barriers. It is a way to create engaging learning environments for students who may lack interest in other subject areas as well. By connecting different disciplines, students are given more reasons to buy in to what they are doing by having a stronger purpose and reason for their work. The observations of all three teachers support the perspectives of Catterall, Chapleau and Iwanaga (1999) in which arts
instruction provides students with an accessible opportunity to succeed by having information and ways of thinking presented in a variety of ways. With the continuous push for inquiry-based learning to enable critical thinking, it is important to note the shared thoughts of Kurnaedy (2008) and observations of teachers such as Tracey and Valerie who state that dance should be used as literacy throughout other subjects. Teachers often hold misconceptions that dance is used solely for the purpose of exploring emotions, when its ability to easily engage students in the creative and inquiry process through its constant process of questioning can and should be taken advantage of across disciplines.

Finally, Valerie’s study which focused on improving math scores by having students embody mathematical concepts through dance is fairly similar to the study mentioned in Chapter 2 conducted by researchers at DePaul University who suggested that dance can be used as a way to improve reading skills for students (ETFO 2011 citing McMahon, Rose, & Parks, 2003). Both studies experienced comparable results in which students who embodied reading or math concepts through dance were performing considerably higher in each respective subject when compared to students who were taught using traditional methods. All three teachers also expressed the endless possibilities of dance integration in all subjects as dance has the ability to use anything as a source – an attribute that is especially valuable in an elementary classroom.

2. **What successes do teachers experience when implementing dance education?**

The majority of successes that teachers experience when implementing dance education can be attributed to the several positive student impacts that teachers experience first-hand. When discussing the perceived impact that dance can have on students, a common theme emerged specifically tailored to students who are labeled as low-achieving in the traditional learning environment due to their ‘unique’ need to move, to explore, think, and understand. It is important to note the contrast of these students’ learning
behaviours in a dance setting as highlighted by Baum, Owen, Orek (1997) and Valerie, who consistently observes these students demonstrating a range of transferable learning skills such as self-regulation, problem solving, self-assessment, and perseverance when being taught through dance. Furthermore, Kenanen, Hetland, Winner (2000) and Shannon share similar thoughts about dance programs providing these students, as well as all other students, the opportunity to shine and feel confident. It is essential that in a world of such divergent learners, that all students are given the opportunity to feel successful in learning, and it is evident that dance education is an opportunity to do that.

Catterall, Chapleau, Iwanaga (1999), Shannon, and Valerie all express one of the most distinctive ways that dance can contribute to a positive and supportive learning environment for students; dance gives students the opportunity to feel a sense of community and belonging. By having students create, collaborate, and move together, they foster a strong bond and attachment to those around them, which can easily translate into a positive learning environment for all students throughout the day. A consensus between Valerie and Colla J. Macdonald (1991) is that dance is more than a physical activity, and has the ability to impact the body, mind, and soul by having students outwardly express inner feelings, thoughts, and opinions, to simultaneously engage the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of a child. Such connections are noteworthy for teachers who value holistic education.

One of the more obvious impacts that dance has on students is the ability to deeply immerse students in the creative process. Fraser (1991) and Tracey echo each other’s thoughts when they each explain that dance education helps all students engage in the creative process, which furthers their critical thinking abilities. Students engage in critical thinking through creativity by connecting their thoughts with their movements, and then
being given a platform to share ideas with one another to discover similarities and differences between themselves and everyone/everything around them.

Valerie expressed that the youth of today have a huge lack of resiliency and often feel isolated and unsure how to talk or connect with people. It is significant then to compare the skills necessary for the 21st century worker with the skills nurtured by arts education. People for Education (2012) list skills such as creativity, problem solving, risk-taking, communication, and self-assessment as necessary for an innovative contemporary worker and notably, all three teachers mention each of these skills as being a direct result for students who participate in dance education.

3. **What challenges or obstacles do elementary teachers face when implementing dance into the classroom?**

Although the teachers in this study experience very few challenges or obstacles that impede their own teaching of dance education, each teacher was able to reflect on the possible challenges that other teachers may face as well as some overarching and ongoing obstacles that have contributed to the inconsistent implementation of dance education. One of the biggest reasons for dance being the most neglected subject in Ontario schools is the lack of support for teachers. People for Education (2012), Tracey, and Valerie all express that the major gap is between curriculum expectations and pre-service teacher programs. Despite the fact that dance has been an independent subject within the arts curriculum since 2009, many teacher training programs allot little to no instruction time for dance. This undoubtedly contributes to the feelings of discomfort that many teachers feel when approaching dance education. In addition to little training in this subject area, teachers often have a difficult time because they were not personally taught this way and thus feel even more unfamiliar with the subject. As Bond and Stinson (2007) outline, teachers will experience students who are fearful or lack confidence so it is extremely important then that
Teachers feel capable and confident themselves. Furthermore, teachers who have been teaching before the 2009 curriculum change are not receiving the amount of accessible professional development required for these changes to realistically be executed. An issue such as lack of sufficient teaching space will always be a challenge for teaching dance, but proper training or mentoring can provide teachers with strategies to actually use desks and chairs in a dance lesson and avoid being discouraged.

An additional challenge that keeps the implementation of dance education stagnant is teacher misconceptions about the dance curriculum. As Kurnaedy (2008) previously pointed out, teachers often mistake dance as a subject that mainly focuses on feelings and emotions, and all three teachers point out that educators commonly assume that teaching a dance class requires a teacher to create and teach choreography at the front of a room – a misconception that was suggested to be in part due to the media’s portrayal of teaching dance. Many teachers can easily avoid these misconceptions by simply reading the dance curriculum and realizing that it is written with teachers with no dance backgrounds in mind. Rather than focusing on steps and technique, the dance curriculum aims to facilitate the creative process for students and uses dance as a tool to explore and communicate various ideas and concepts.

The attitudes of teachers, which may be a result of other societal or cultural factors, can often become a huge obstacle for implementation as well. People for Education (2012) and Tracey both compare the differences in cultural connections to dance in other countries such as Finland or Singapore where more instructional time is given to the arts over mathematics, and dance is embedded into students’ existence and culture, where in Canada, there are clear societal hierarchies of education, with the arts at the bottom. Even when looking at the hierarchy within the arts, dance remains at the very bottom as expressed by Valerie and Dils (2007). Valerie makes an enlightening observation on this topic, and suggests that maybe it is the body itself that gets in the way of teachers. Perhaps in addition
to a lack of support and confidence, teachers feel more vulnerable and exposed when teaching dance in comparison to other arts where there is an instrument, canvas, or voice to rely on.

**Implications**

As a dance advocate, the implications for this study are disheartening and concerning. With the countless benefits that dance education can have on students, especially those who do not benefit from traditional teaching methods, it is daunting to know that it often has little to no presence in Ontario classrooms. While Ontario does have dance education explicitly written into the curriculum, the challenge remains to close the gap between curricular expectations and classroom implementation.

As a future educator, this highlights the inconsistencies that will occur throughout classrooms despite mandated expectations and that many educators may be lacking the confidence and training to try integrating dance in their own classroom. It is my duty then to not only implement these practices within my own classroom, but to educate other teachers through mentoring, collaborative planning and/or teaching, and sharing of resources.

**Recommendations**

Connections made with literature and teacher voices provided insight for the following recommendations for the Ministry, College of Teachers, educational administration, and teachers for more consistent dance integration practices:

- Allot more instructional time to dance education in pre-service teaching programs to ensure qualified and confident generalist teachers
- Add “dance” to teacher’s timetables to prioritize the subject and hold teachers accountable
• Establish a mentorship program for teachers who are becoming acquainted with the new curriculum
  o Teachers may find an expert within one’s respective school or can bring in a specialist (similar to the Itinerant Music Program)
• Administrators should expect that dance is reported on in every term of the school year as opposed to one
• Create Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that focus on dance education implementation in the classroom
• Send one teacher from each school to professional development sessions to return as an “expert”
• Administrators should view and approve long-range plans for all subjects at the beginning of the year
• Implementation of dance education should be done from a young age

Limitations and Further Study

Through a qualitative approach, this study provided a platform for experienced teachers to share valuable practices and insights for other generalist educators. There are a number of ways that this research study can be expanded. Firstly, the study was limited to the thoughts and practices of three dance educators in the same board who all have a strong dance background and thus, have experienced close to no challenges. It would provide further insight to speak to teachers from a range of school boards who are fairly new to implementing dance education to understand their views on the value of dance education as well as the challenges and successes that they have experienced given their limited dance background. It would also be powerful to perform a quantitative analysis of dance education and its effects on a specific learning skill for a specific age of students.
Finally, it may be additionally informative to do a comparison of dance education practices and impacts on elementary and high school teachers and students.

**Conclusion**

It is important to acknowledge the various factors that have thus far impacted the implementation of dance education. As I complete my pre-service teaching program, I acknowledge that there is more work to be done in dance advocacy and I optimistically anticipate that instructional time for dance education will soon be given to student teachers to ensure that they enter their classrooms feeling confident and eager to teach dance. As a future elementary teacher, I can only hope that the administrators at each school begin to hold teachers accountable for delivering all curriculum expectations as each discipline offers its own benefits for students. Some teachers are doing a disservice to students by neglecting dance education in their classrooms, and it is essential that educators break out of the societal hierarchies of education to give all students a platform to succeed and experience the joy of learning in all subjects.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Letter

Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ______________________

Dear ______________________,

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto currently enrolled as a student in the Master of Teaching program. In line with the requirements for this program and my own research interests, I am studying how a small sample of elementary teachers are using dance as pedagogy across curriculum subject areas and what perceived impact they observe this having for students. I believe that your level of experience and knowledge on the subject will provide invaluable insights into my topic and will provide you with the opportunity to share your practice and inform more teachers about how to do this work.

The primary research gathered will be used for a major research paper that is designed to give teacher candidates an opportunity to explore educational topics using qualitative research techniques. My research supervisor, who is overlooking the process, is Professor Mary Ann Fratia at OISE.

The interview process will take 30-45 minutes and the interview will be recorded using a handheld audio recording device. The interview will occur at a place and time that is convenient for you, outside of school time. All names and any other vulnerable information will remain confidential, only to be seen by my supervisor and myself. You are free to decline answering any specific questions and may withdraw from participation at any stage of the research process. There are no known risks to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy. You will be subject to minimal risk throughout the process.

The contents of the interview(s) will be transcribed verbatim and used for my research project, which will include a final paper as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. The raw data from the interview will be disposed of within 5 years of the interview date.

Please sign the attached form if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Please do not hesitate to contact me and/___________ if you have any further questions or concerns. Thank you for all of your interest and participation.

Sincerely,
Ria Aikat
Phone: (613) 263 1742
Email: ria.aikat@mail.utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Ria Aikat and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I also agree to having the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me how long you have been teaching and what grade(s) you currently teach?

2) As a pre-requisite to participation in this research, you indicated that you are committed to the implementation dance education into your everyday teaching practice. Can you tell me how you became interested in and committed to this work?

   [Potential prompts]
   - What did you study in your under/graduate degree(s)?
   - Personal experiences with physical education / lifestyle/family history

3) As a pre-requisite to participation in this research, you indicated that you integrate dance education into your everyday teaching practice. Can you paint a picture for me of what this typically looks like in your classroom?

   [Potential Prompts]
   a. What are some of the factors you consider when planning dance integration? (e.g. time of day, curriculum alignment etc.)

4) What are some examples of dance activities you do with your students?

5) In what ways (if any) do you integrate dance into the curriculum (language, math, social studies etc.)?
   a. Can you give me some examples of how you have integrated dance with other subject areas?
   b. What subject areas do you find it easier and more difficult to integrate dance?

6) What resources do you use/consult in implementing dance? (e.g. associations or specialists, curriculum packages, books, videos)

7) What are students’ reactions and attitudes toward dance that you notice?

8) In what ways, if any, have you observed dance to impact student learning?

9) In what ways, if any, have you observed dance to impact student behaviour during the lesson or throughout the day?

10) Can you give me a sense of some of the success criteria that are important to you when implementing dance into your day?

11) What are the biggest challenges you face with implementing dance?
12) Is the implementation of dance something that is prioritized in your current school? What indicators of that have you noticed? (whether yes or no)

13) How do you think the school staff and administration perceive the implementation of dance education?

14) Does the administration in your school hold teachers accountable for implementing dance education? If yes, how? If no, how do you think they could do that?

15) Research is beginning to show that despite Ontario curriculum expectations, many teachers do not implement dance education. Why do you think that is? What obstacles do you believe stand in the way of everyday integration of dance education?

16) What are your recommendations to teachers, administrators and the education system more broadly for increasing commitment and implementation of dance education in Ontario classrooms?